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ABSTRACT

The Extension organization faces a new challenge to develop and maintain partnerships at the local level, bringing together people, programs, and resources. Although the Extension Service already operates under the concept of a partnership between federal, state, and local governments, the federal partner has created a vacuum in this three-way partnership through budget cuts. If Extension is going to attempt to serve the most important needs of the current information society, then the vacuum must be filled by other civic service organizations at the local level. Although partnerships already exist between Extension and other organizations, most of them are short-term and temporary. They often become fragmented after the planning stage. The following conditions are required for development and maintenance of partnerships in Extension: (1) generate awareness of the importance of working together; (2) develop short- and long-term program partnerships; (3) agree upon goals and objectives of programs; (4) clearly define sources of contributions and responsibility; and (5) share equally in credit or blame. Extension is increasingly being asked to help in the programs of civic service organizations, and with its unique partnership with governments, Extension can undertake a wide variety of partnership efforts to help people to help themselves in attaining a higher quality of life and creating excellence in Extension. (KC)

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WORKING TOGETHER: A Prime Resource for Extension Programming at the Local Level

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WORKING TOGETHER: A Prime Resource for Extension Programming at the Local Level

The environment in which Extension conducts educational programs has changed over the years to meet needs of the nation and its people. I am talking about an informal education organization that is over 71 years old, but one with frequent gestation or rebirth periods.

During each of these periods, Extension has mainly emphasized delivering new programs. However, the beginning of the 1980 decade brought a new challenge to the Extension organization not only to offer new programs, but also to develop and maintain partnerships at the local level bringing together people, programs, and resources.

Partnerships are Inevitable

The Extension service is already operating under the concept of a partnership between Federal, state, and local governments. However, the Federal partner has created a vacuum in this three-way partnership through budget cuts[1]. If Extension is going to attempt to serve the most important needs of the current information society, then the vacuum must be filled by other civic-service organizations at the local level.

A Need for Real Partnerships

Our observations, experiences, and discussions with various personnel of Extension and other civic-service organizations reveal that certain partnerships are already existing between Extension and other organizations. However, in general, these partnerships can be described as "quick fixes" except in 4-H programming[2]. Many of the Extension partnerships with other organizations are informal as well as temporary in nature. We have seen that partners talked about cooperation, organization, leadership, programming, and group decision making, but when they get down to work, they become fragmented again.

A way must be found to bring these fragmented partners together and to fill the vacuum created in the partnership in Extension. Now it is time for Extension not to become a partner with other organizations to get what Extension wants, but to motivate them to work together to meet the needs of the information society. Thus, Extension must learn to work together not only to develop but also to maintain the partnerships for now and the future.

Conditions for Working Together

As I worked through the mounds of available materials on partnerships, we perceived the following conditions are not only necessary but also required for development and maintenance of partnerships in Extension:

1. Generate great awareness of the importance of working together.

2. Develop short and long term program partnerships.
3. Mutually agree upon goals and objectives of programs.
4. Clearly define contributions of time, labor, materials, services and funds to assure that every partner has a responsibility and interest not only in planning but also in implementing programs.
5. Equally share the credits for failures and successes.

An absence of, or weakness in, any of the above conditions will result in ineffective Extension partnerships.

Developing Partnerships

There are many organizations, all the way from AFL-CIO department of community service to Zonta International, involved in meeting the needs of the society through planned programs in education, jobs, housing, family, community development, crimes, teenage delinquencies, and other services for the elderly and disadvantaged[3]. Evidently, Extension conducts many of the same programs as other organizations in an attempt to bring together people, resources, and programs.

Research studies show that partnerships in Extension are becoming more important in view of the tight budget for many programs of the civic-service organizations. Extension is increasingly being asked to help in their programs[4]. By law, the Extension organization is committed to use the knowledge of the land-grant institutions to improve people's well-being. Thus, Extension has the unique leadership ability to develop long-lasting partnerships in the Extension environment.

Partnership Benefits to Extension

Extension organization can derive many benefits from working together with other organizations, especially at the local level. It has been pointed out that Extension has little to lose and much to gain as an organization by working together in meeting the local needs[5]. Extension could gain the following major benefits from the partnerships:

1. Working together with civic-service organizations is a way for Extension to develop viable comprehensive programs that are more effective in meeting society's needs at the local level.
2. Extension can tap people who have different types of knowledge, skills, and resources to contribute which are crucial to the success of programs in a pluralistic and democratic society.
3. Extension organization will be compelled to make priorities among its major program areas over the years. Under such circumstances, Extension must shed lower priority service areas such as International programs and 4-H in order to give higher priority to areas such as agriculture[6]. Accordingly, developing and maintaining partnerships might help Extension to retain those traditional programs with a new image.

Potential Threats to Partnerships

Partnerships may be affected more by human and economic factors than by technological or environmental factors. The human factors consist of both strengths and weaknesses. Although the Extension partnership has strength to reason, to reflect, to persevere in the face

of difficulties, to solve problems and to change, it is usually affected by unconscious outcomes of human interactions, limited communication, biases, conflicting interests, fear, and resistance to change. Further, since a law to balance the budget by 1991 has been passed by the Congress many civic-service organizations may reduce the services provided as a result of losing financial support from the government. When this happens, Extension will lose many partners especially at the local level.

Conclusion

One of the basic roles of Extension education in the 1990s will be to develop and maintain partnerships with existing and emerging civic-service organizations at the local level. To achieve this paramount objective, Extension must reach out to those organizations to strengthen the partnerships through having its partners understand, accept, and participate in the local Extension educational programs.

Extension partnerships will help minimize the problems related to people, resources, and programs, but Extension as an organization must recognize the identities of its partners who are involved in the same kind of service-oriented programs.

Extension, with its unique partnership with governments, can undertake a wide variety of partnership efforts to help people to help themselves in attaining a higher quality of life style and creating Excellence in Extension.

FOOTNOTES

1. P.D. Warner and J.A. Christenson, *The Cooperative Extension Service-A National Assessment* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc, 1984).

2. National 4-H Council, *Building on Experiences-A Commitment to Excellence* (Chevy Chase,MD: National 4-H Council Publication series, 1985).

3. USDA/Extension Service, *Directory of Selected Private Civic-Service organizations for Cooperative 4-H Programming, ESC-581* (Washington, DC: U.S.Government Printing Office, 1977).

4. H.W. Shelton and B.W. Sorter, "Improving Interagency Teamwork," *Journal of Extension*, (November/December, 1980), 18-23.

5. U.S.Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *Health Education in the Cooperative Extension Service: Present Status and Recommendation for Future Action* (Atlanta, Georgia: Center for Disease Control, 1978).

6. W. Prawl, R. Medlin and J. Gross, *Adult and Continuing education Through the Cooperative Extension Service* (Columbia: University of Missouri, Extension Division, 1984).